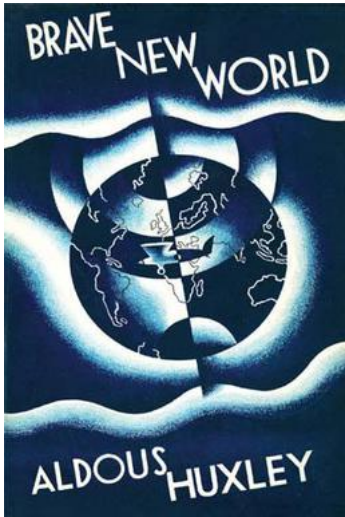


News & Resources: review – The Sexual Politics of Huxley’s ‘Brave New World’ & Orwell’s ‘1984’



What surprising things do the classic 20th-century dystopian novels *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley) and *1984* (George Orwell) have to say about sexual regulation in the West today? Here are some key passages ...

Speculative fiction about the future is a major technique by which authors introduce new ideas that critique contemporary norms. One such case is the classic futuristic novel *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (New York: Harper, 1932, 2006), which has been a bestseller since its publication in 1932. Although this novel is presented as if the future is dystopian, there are instances where Huxley is obviously critiquing contemporary sexual repression. For example, in a scene on pp. 32-33, a director of a child education center is giving a tour to some high school students who are visiting. When they come upon a group of young children who are off in the bushes doing what the director calls “ordinary erotic play,” he tells them (and their response is in parentheses):

“What I’m going to tell you now,” he said, “may sound incredible. But then, when you’re not accustomed to history, most facts about the past do sound incredible.” He let out the amazing truth. For a very long period before the [21th century], and even for some generations afterwards, erotic play between children had been regarded as abnormal (there was a roar of laughter); and not only abnormal, actually immoral (no!); and had therefore been rigorously suppressed.

A look of astonished incredulity appeared on the faces of his listeners. Poor little kids not allowed to amuse themselves? They could not believe it.

“Even adolescents,” the Director was saying, “even adolescents like yourselves.”

“Not possible! ... No sex? Nothing?”

“In most cases, absolutely nothing, till they were over twenty years old.”

“Twenty years old?” echoed the students in a chorus of loud disbelief.

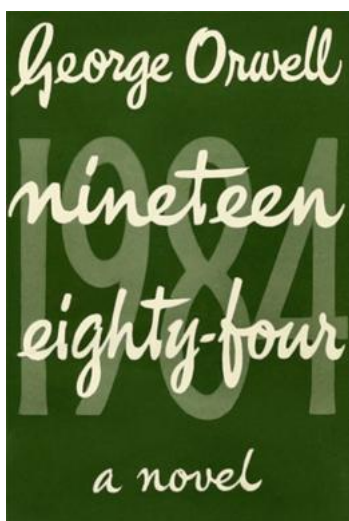
“Twenty,” the Director repeated. “I told you that you’d find it incredible/”

“But what happened?” they asked. “What were the results”

“The results were terrible. ... [p. 41] No wonder these poor pre-moderns were mad and wicked and miserable. Their world didn’t allow them to take things easily, didn’t allow them to be sane, virtuous, happy. ... What with the temptations and the lonely remorse, what with all the diseases and the endless isolating pain, what with the uncertainties and the poverty ... how could they be stable?”

After the visitors passed, the children “then returned to their amusements among the leaves.” [p. 34]. The author describes the erotic sex play of the happy children as occurring where “sunshine lay like warm honey on the naked bodies of children tumbling promiscuously among the hibiscus blossoms.” [p. 39].

In this future time, people thought negatively about sexual denial and about monogamy’s “exclusiveness, a narrow channeling of impulse and energy. But [today] every one belongs to every one else,” the Director concluded.... The students nodded, emphatically agreeing with a statement ... accepted, not merely as true, but as axiomatic, self-evident, utterly indisputable.”[p. 40]. By suggesting that sexual expression by children, and general promiscuity by everyone, might be considered in the future as healthy and normal, Huxley’s book was a radical contrast to 1932.



George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Penguin, 1949, 2003).

Orwell posits a future in which the government, referred to as “The Party,” led by its totalitarian leader “Big Brother,” tries to control every aspect of human life. Chief among these is sexual desire. In his novel Orwell criticizes the way governments (including our own) use sex as a central concern for totalitarian suppression. He wrote of the younger generation:

[p. 70] Chastity was as deeply ingrained in them as Party loyalty. By careful early conditioning, by games and cold water, by the rubbish that was dinned into them at school and in the Youth League, by lectures, parades, songs, slogans, and martial music, the natural feeling had been driven out of them. ... The sexual act, successfully performed, was rebellion. Desire was thought crime....

In order to deal with this type of oppression, he wrote:

[p. 134] Life was quite simple. You wanted a good time; “they” meaning the Party, wanted to stop you having it; [to survive] you broke the rules as best you could. ... The clever thing was to break the rules and stay alive all the same. ... Not rebelling against authority but simply evading it, as a rabbit dodges a dog.....

[p. 135] The inner meaning of the Party’s sexual puritanism was not merely that the sex instinct created a world of its own which was outside the Party’s control and which therefore had to be destroyed if possible. What was more important was that sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into war fever and leader worship. ...

When you make love you’re using up energy; and afterward you feel happy and don’t give a damn for anything. They [p. 136] can’t bear you to feel like that. They want you to be bursting with energy all the time. All this marching up and down and cheering and waving flags is simply sex gone sour. If you’re happy inside yourself, why should you get excited about Big Brother ... and all the rest of their bloody rot? ... There was a direct, intimate connection between chastity and political orthodoxy. For how could the fear, the hatred, and the lunatic credulity which the Party needed in its members be kept at the right pitch except by bottling down some powerful instinct and using it as a driving force? The sex impulse was dangerous to the Party.